

# **OSU Student Involvement in and Opinions about the Off-Campus Disturbances**

Office of Student Affairs Assessment  
May 2002

## INTRODUCTION

This survey of Ohio State University (OSU) undergraduate students was conducted by the Office of Student Affairs Assessment and the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences' Center for Survey Research. The purpose of the survey was to collect data about student perceptions of events related to off-campus riots and social disturbances during the 2001-2002 academic year and to track changes in students' attitudes since a similar survey was administered in May 2001.

### **Context**

On Saturday, April 20<sup>th</sup>, the house parties on Chittenden Avenue escalated into riots near the Ohio State campus for the second year in a row. Police in full riot gear used tear gas and arrested 26 people, including 13 OSU students as they faced a crowd of several hundred who were stopping traffic, damaging parked cars, and throwing bottles and cans into the street and at police officers. Twelve police officers were injured in the disturbance. Further incidents were anticipated for the following weekend on Norwich Avenue. Numerous strategies were used to prevent further disturbances by the University and the city of Columbus. In the end, rain and cold weather further deterred party-goers from spilling into the streets and creating the conditions for riotous behavior.

Unfortunately, these incidents are not unique for Ohio State or for other college campuses. During the 2000-2001 academic year, Ohio State experienced three similar events – one after the Ohio State-Michigan football game and two corresponding to the annual spring parties on Chittenden Avenue and Norwich Avenue. Other institutions such as University of Maryland, Penn State, Ohio University, Michigan State, Purdue University, Indiana University, and the University of Arizona have experienced riots recently. Many times these events are spurred by athletic contests, alcohol, and/or “the right to party.”

### **Methodology**

During the week of April 29<sup>th</sup>, a random sample of OSU undergraduate students was contacted by phone. The sample pool of 586 students was drawn from the Winter 2002 student database. Initial attempts to contact students were made at their local telephone numbers. If the local number was not available or when students were no longer at the local number, attempts were then made students' home numbers. In many cases, viable telephone numbers were called upwards of 10 times to try to reach a respondent at a time that was convenient for her or him to be interviewed. In 9 cases the student was ineligible to participate in the survey, and in another 54 cases interviewers could not contact the respondent because the telephone numbers provided were not valid and new contact information was unavailable. The remaining 523 cases were *presumed* to be eligible cases with valid contact information. A total of 304 interviews were completed, for a response rate of 58 percent using the most conservative calculation suggested by the American Association for Public Opinion Research.

The cooperation rate for those cases in which interviewers spoke with the eligible respondent was 95 percent, again using a conservative definition.

The data were weighted by gender and race to reflect the composition of the Columbus campus undergraduate population. In theory, in 19 cases of 20, the results for the weighted sample of OSU students will differ due to sampling error by no more than 5.6 percentage points in either direction from what would have been obtained by interviewing all undergraduate students enrolled at Ohio State during Spring quarter, 2002.

In addition, all surveys are subject to other potential sources of imprecision and bias which may be associated with the question wording and/or ordering, the response rate, and the quality of the interviewers, for example, and which could lead to somewhat different results from the present findings.

### **Description of Sample**

Of the 304 undergraduate students who responded (unweighted sample):

- Gender – 52.3% were female; and 47.7% were male
- Race/ethnicity – 87.2% were White; 5.6% were African-American/Black; 3.6% were Asian/Pacific Islander; and 1.3% were Hispanic/Latino. In addition, 1.6% were international students.
- Age: 48.0% were under 21; 49.4% were 21 to 30 years of age; and 2.6% were over 30.
- Rank: 19.7% were rank 1; 24.7% were rank 2; 24.3% were rank 3; and 31.3% were rank 4.
- Residence: 33.2% lived on campus; 51.0% lived in an off-campus house or apartment; 7.6% lived with parents or other relatives; 5.3% lived in their own home; 2.3% lived in a fraternity/sorority; 0.6% lived elsewhere.
  - Of those who lived on campus, 39.6% lived in the North Area, 47.5% lived in the South Area; and 12.9% in the towers.
  - Of those who lived in an off-campus house or apartment, 79.4% lived in the campus area.
- Alcohol Use: 82.5% reported that they drink alcohol and 57.2% reported being high-risk drinkers; 70.7% reported that they attend campus-area bars.

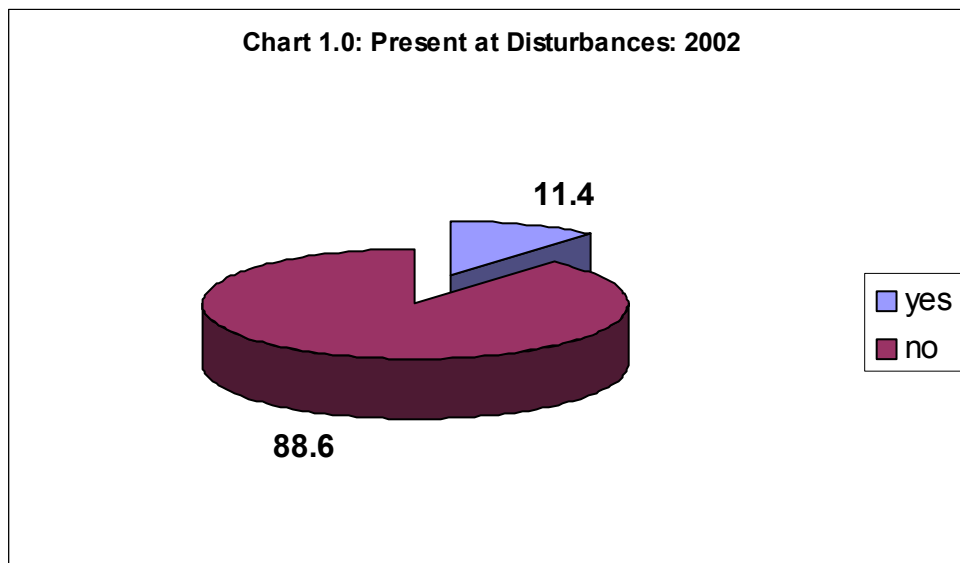
## FINDINGS

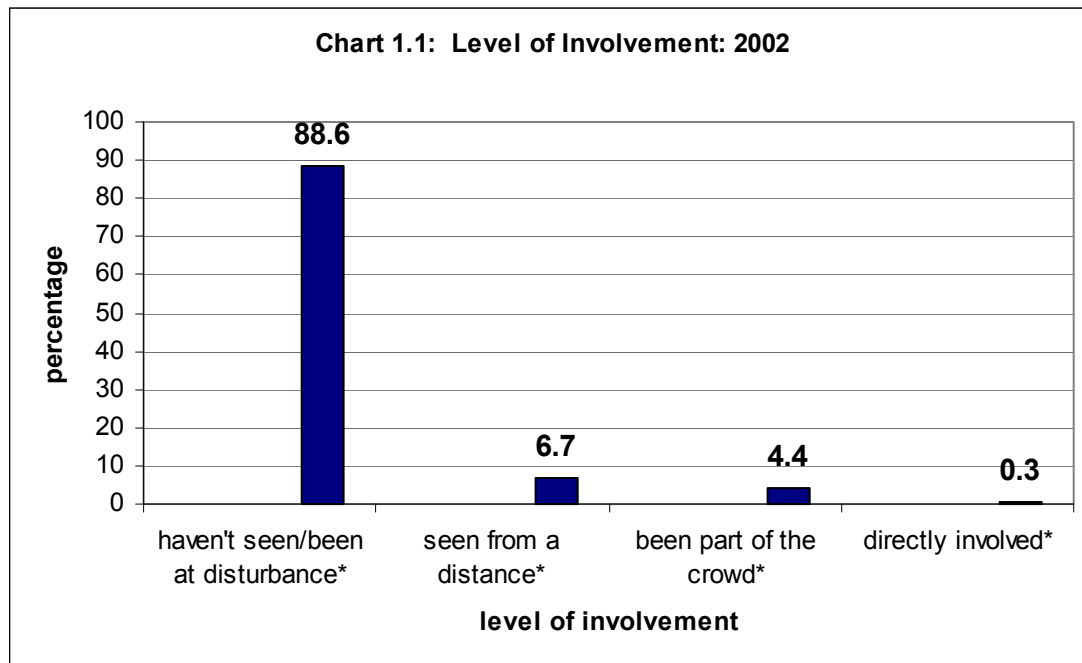
Findings include the level of student involvement in the disturbances, students' general impressions of the riots, their perceptions of who/what is most responsible for the events, and their opinions regarding the various responses to the disturbances. The responses to the disturbances include who is most responsible for stopping the riots, the appropriateness of the responses by the University, the Columbus police, and the media, and the effectiveness of the various strategies implemented to prevent further occurrences. When appropriate and/or available, data are presented with comparisons to students' opinions from the survey administered in Spring of 2001 (SP01).

### **Student Involvement**

Students were asked about their own involvement in the disturbances during Spring 2002 and also during the Fall 2000 and Spring 2001. (See Charts 1.0 & 1.1) *(Data from the SP01 survey are not presented because the comparisons are not direct; in 00-01, there had been three large disturbances prior to the survey whereas there was only one prior to this survey.)*

- Almost 89% (88.6%) of students had not been present at the April 2002 off-campus disturbance.
- Approximately 15% of students surveyed in SP02 responded that they had been present at a disturbance during 2000-2001. (Data not shown)
- Almost 7% (6.7%) of OSU undergraduate students said they had seen the disturbance this spring from a distance.
- Less than 5% (4.4%) said that they had been part of the crowd at the disturbance.





\* Complete response options are as follows: I haven't seen or been at the disturbances. I've seen the disturbances from a distance. I've been part of the crowd at the disturbances. I've been directly involved in the disturbances.

### **General Impressions**

Students were asked their general opinions about the riots. To prevent the order of these questions from biasing responses, the order was randomized from one respondent to the next. In Table 1.0, response frequencies are presented for both SP02 and SP01 survey data. *Although comparisons are made between students' opinions in SP01 and SP02, one needs to remember that students' opinions from one year to the next may reflect differences in the number of disturbances. As previously mentioned, in 2000-2001, there had been three disturbances prior to the administration of the survey, whereas in 2001-2002, there had been one.* In Table 1.1, data are presented for two questions that had not been asked in the first survey.

- Most OSU undergraduate students felt that the off-campus riots and disturbances are an embarrassment to the University community. In SP02, 85.4% either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the statement; 90.5% of students agreed in SP01.
- On another survey item, only 13.7% in SP02 and 15.8% in SP01 agreed that the disturbances are not really a big deal and should be expected in the University district. Those students who were present at the disturbance were more likely to say it was not a big deal than were those who were not there (data not shown).
- The disturbances have made some students, 22.4% in SP02 and 31.8% in SP01, feel less safe in the University district. Also, students living off campus were more likely to report feeling less safe than were residence hall students (data not shown).
- In SP01, 70.8% of students agreed that the presence of large numbers of police creates a hostile environment that leads to violence compared to 63.0% in SP02. Those who were present at the disturbance were more likely to feel that the police presence created a hostile environment than students who had not been present (data not shown).

- Almost 72% (71.8%) of undergraduate students agreed that the behavior of a relatively small number of students is negatively influencing the lives of all students (SP02).
- Almost 74% (73.9%) of students agreed that students who are directly involved with the riots should receive the maximum disciplinary action by the University (SP02). Students who were present at the off-campus disturbance were less likely to agree than were students who were not there (data not shown).

**Table 1.0: Students' general opinions about the riots: 2002 and 2001**

Responses by Percent	The behavior of the rioters is embarrassing to the University community.		The disturbances are not really a big deal and should be expected in the University district.		I feel less safe in the University district because of the disturbances		The presence of large numbers of police creates a hostile environment that leads to violence.	
	2002	2001	2002	2001	2002	2001	2002	2001
2002: n=304 2001: n=565								
Strongly agree	54.4	59.3	3.8	3.2	5.4	8.8	18.8	32.4
Somewhat agree	31.0	31.2	9.9	12.6	17.0	23.0	44.2	38.4
Neither agree nor disagree	6.6	3.7	7.2	8.0	11.3	11.2	9.5	9.4
Somewhat disagree	5.0	4.2	32.9	35.8	31.7	35.2	17.8	13.1
Strongly disagree	3.0	1.4	45.9	40.4	34.2	21.8	9.3	6.0
Don't know	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.0	0.3	0.7

**Table 1.1: Students' general opinions about the riots: 2002**

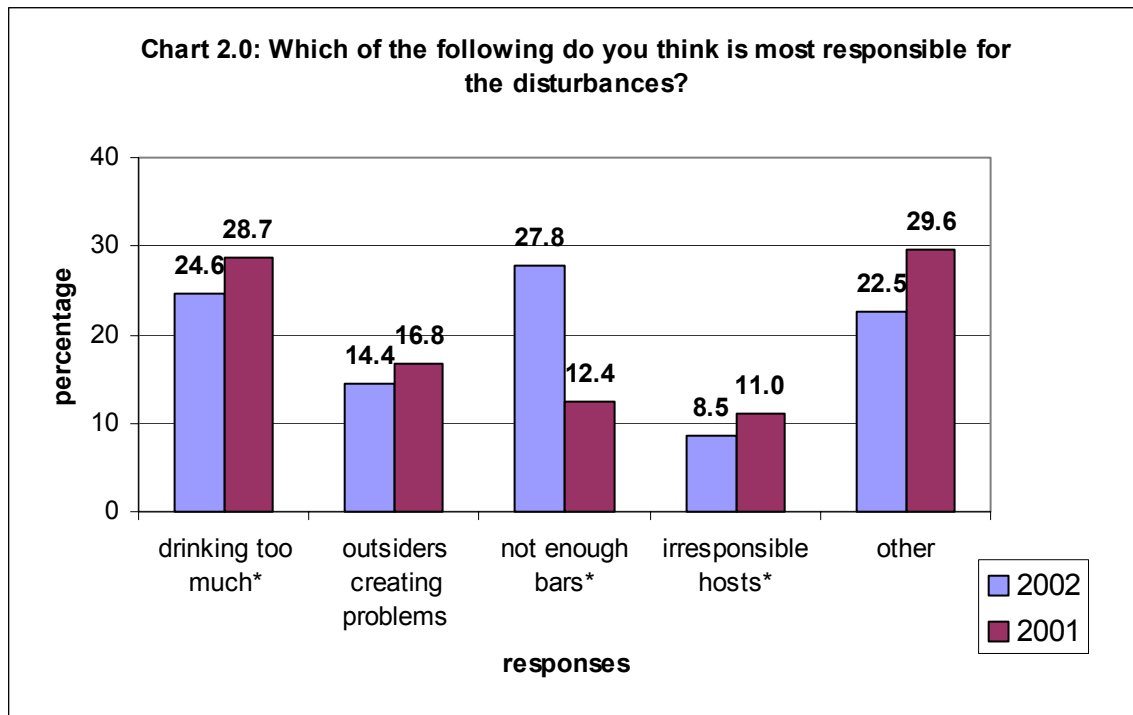
Responses by Percent	The behavior of a relatively small number of students is negatively influencing the lives of all students. (n=304)	Students who are directly involved with the riots should receive the maximum disciplinary action by the University. (n=304)
Strongly agree	35.3	36.6
Somewhat agree	36.5	37.3
Neither agree nor disagree	9.9	10.7
Somewhat disagree	10.9	10.4
Strongly disagree	7.4	3.4
Don't know	0.0	1.7

### **Responsibility for the Disturbances**

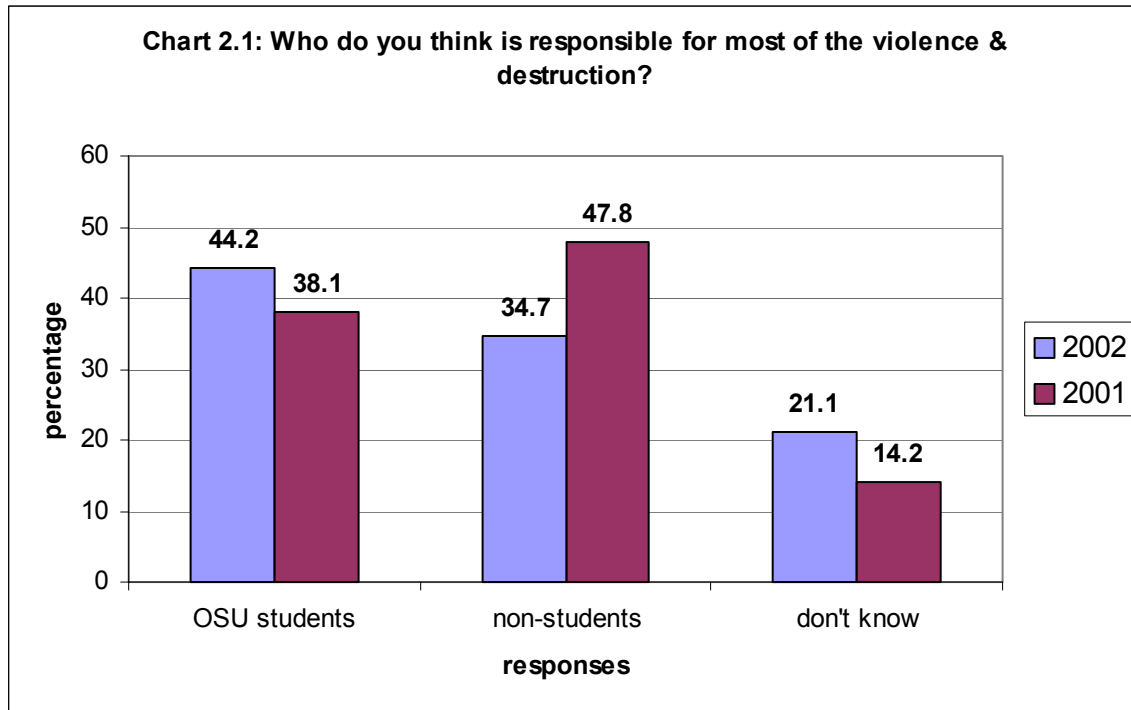
Two questions were asked regarding who/what students thought was the primary cause of the disturbances and who was most responsible for the violence and destruction. Comparisons are provided between 2001 and 2002 responses. (See Charts 2.0 & 2.1)

- In both SP01 and SP02, about a quarter of students thought that “partying-goers drinking too much” held the most responsibility for the disturbances.
- In SP02, students were twice as likely to respond that the lack of bars in the campus area was most responsible for the disturbances than they were in SP01. Almost 28% (27.8%) responded this way in SP02 compared to 12.4% in SP01. The increased media attention on the closing of campus-area bars and the closing of six additional bars may account for this increase.

- Among the “other” responses, 32 students (10.5% of the sample) commented that it was some combination of reasons, and 14 students (4.6% of the sample) noted that the police presence was most responsible for the disturbances.
- Students were split over who is most responsible for the violence and destruction during the disturbances. In SP02, 44.2% said students; 34.7% said non-students, and 21.1% didn’t know who was responsible for the violence. Compared to SP01, students were slightly more likely to attribute the responsibility to students and were more likely to respond that they didn’t know in SP02.



**Complete response options are as follows:** drinking too much = Party-goers drinking too much. Not enough bars = not enough bars for students to go to. Irresponsible hosts = party-givers who let things get out of hand



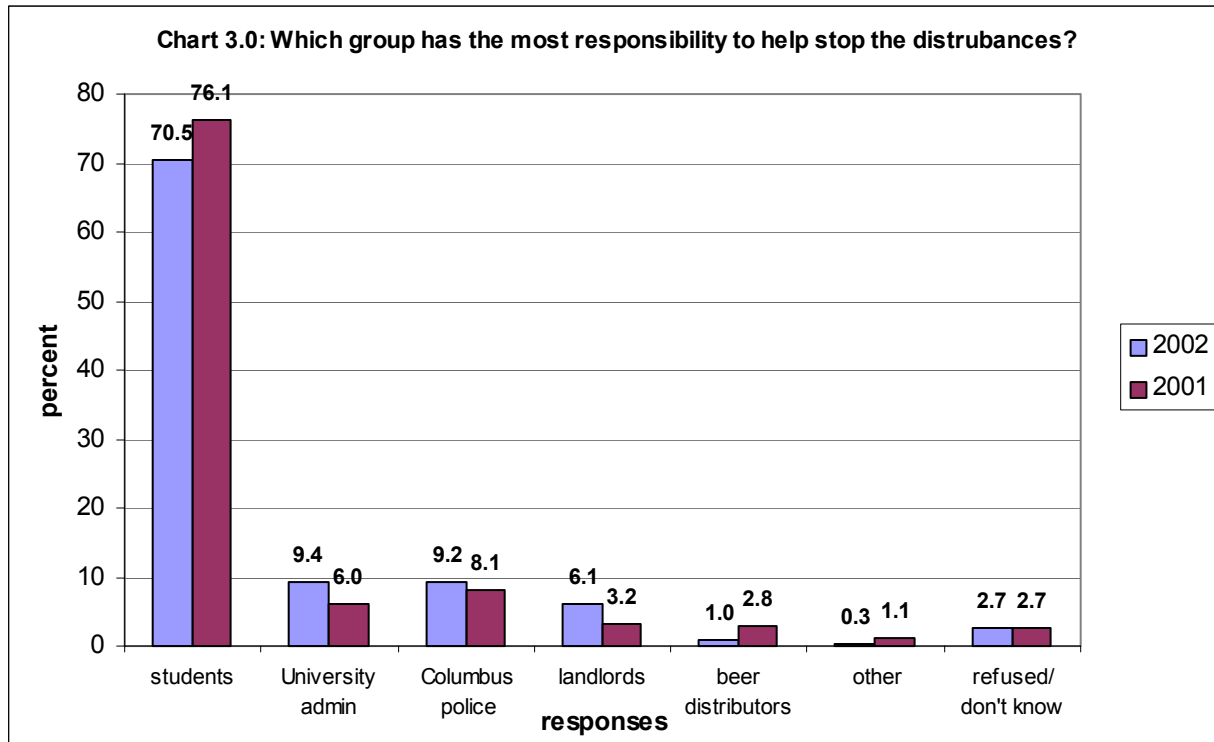
### **Responses to the Disturbances**

In this section, students' perceptions regarding who is responsible to stop the disturbances, the appropriateness of the responses by the University, the police, and the media, and the effectiveness of strategies used to deter future disturbances are presented.

#### **Responsibility to Stop Disturbances**

Students were asked which group has the most responsibility to help stop the disturbances. (See Chart 3.0)

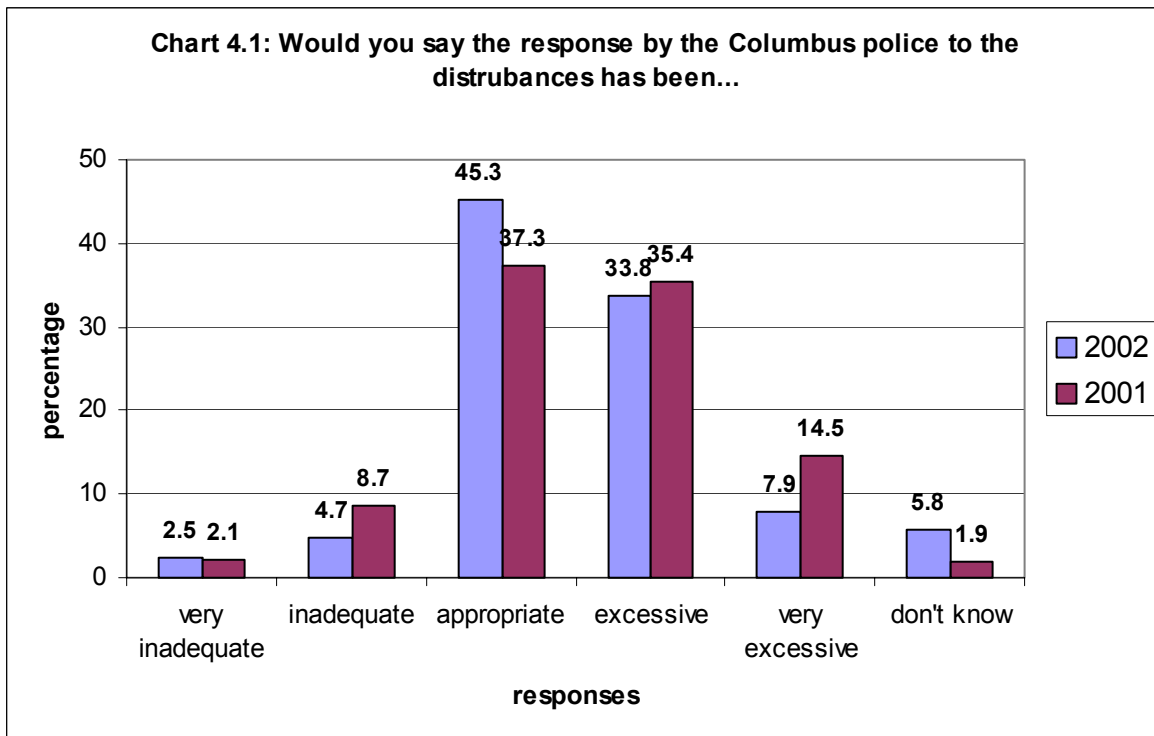
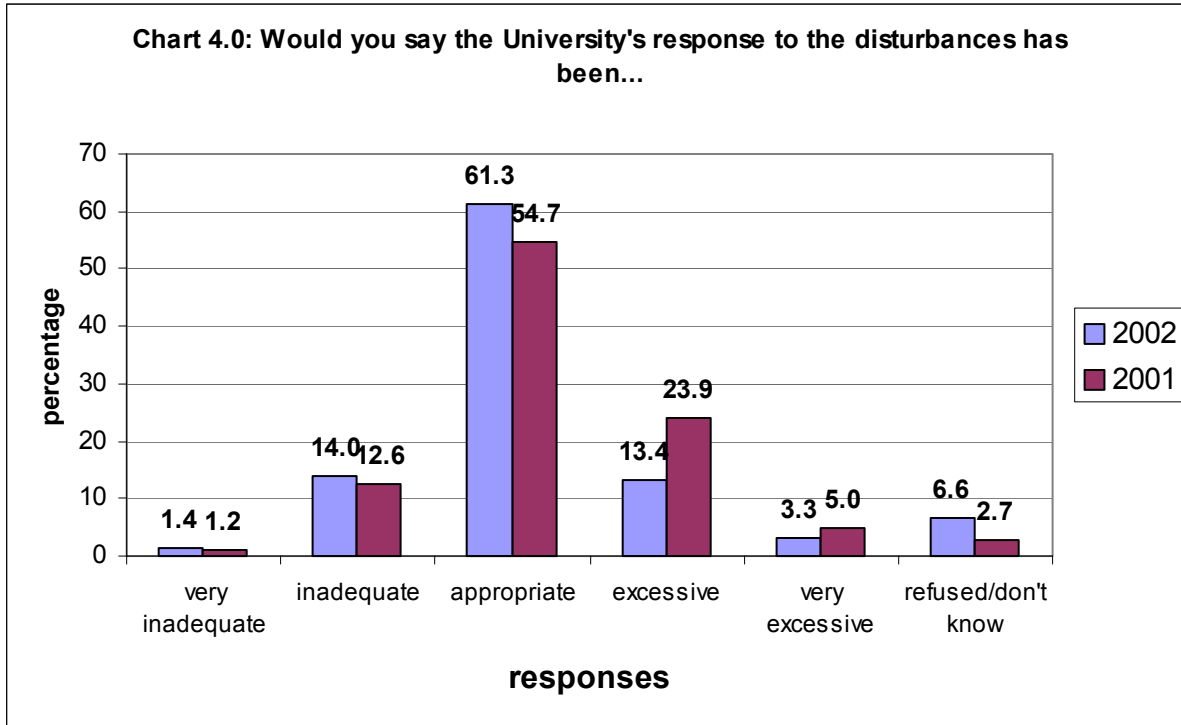
- In SP02, 70.5% of respondents thought that students have the most responsibility to help stop the disturbances.
- Approximately 9% (9.2%) said the Columbus police had the most responsibility, and another 9.4% said the University.
- Another 6.1% said the landlords.
- Overall, students' responses were similar when comparing SP01 and SP02 except that in SP02, students were slightly less likely to respond that students had the most responsibility.

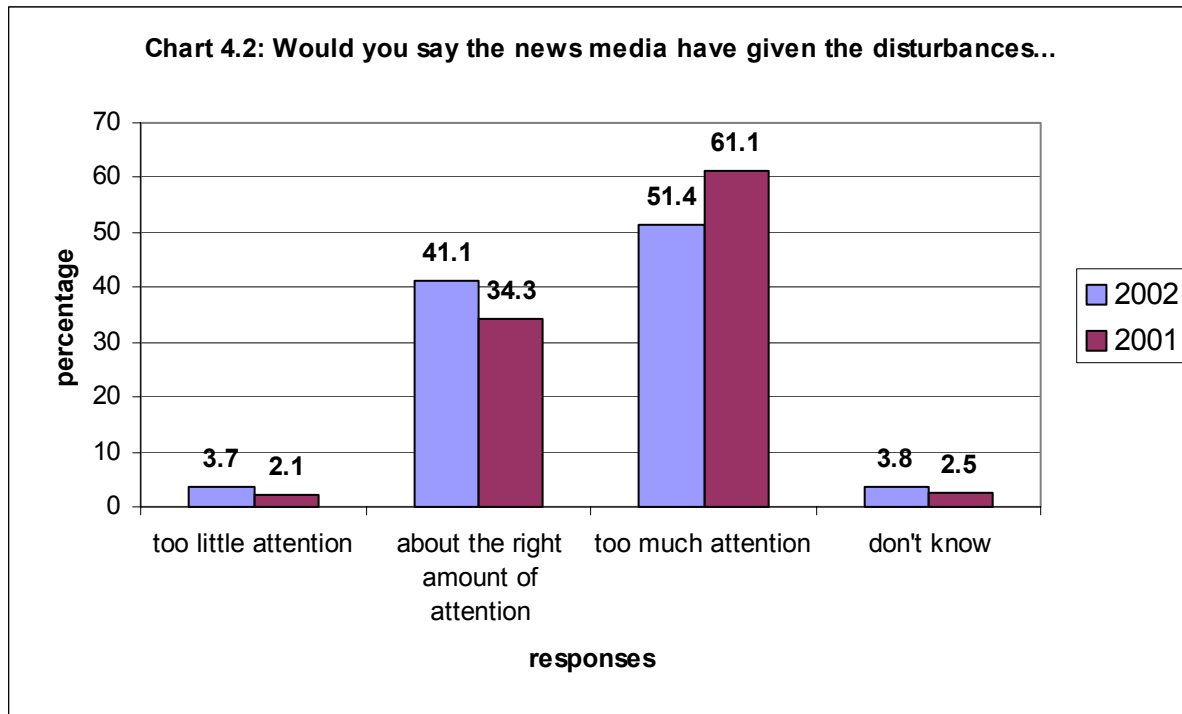


### Appropriateness of Responses

Three survey questions addressed the appropriateness of the responses to the disturbances by the University, the police, and the media. (See Charts 4.0-4.2)

- Approximately 61% (61.3%) of OSU undergraduates thought the University's response to the situation is appropriate (SP02).
- Approximately 45% (45.3%) of respondents thought the Columbus police's response to the situation is appropriate (SP02).
- Evidence suggests that students are generally more supportive of the actions taken by the University and the police in SP02 than they were in SP01. For example, in SP01, 28.9% felt the University's response was at least somewhat excessive compared to only 16.7% in SP02. In SP01, 49.9% felt the Columbus police's response had been somewhat excessive compared to 41.7% in SP02.
- In SP02, 51.4% of students felt the media had given too much attention to the disturbances; this was down almost 10% from SP01.



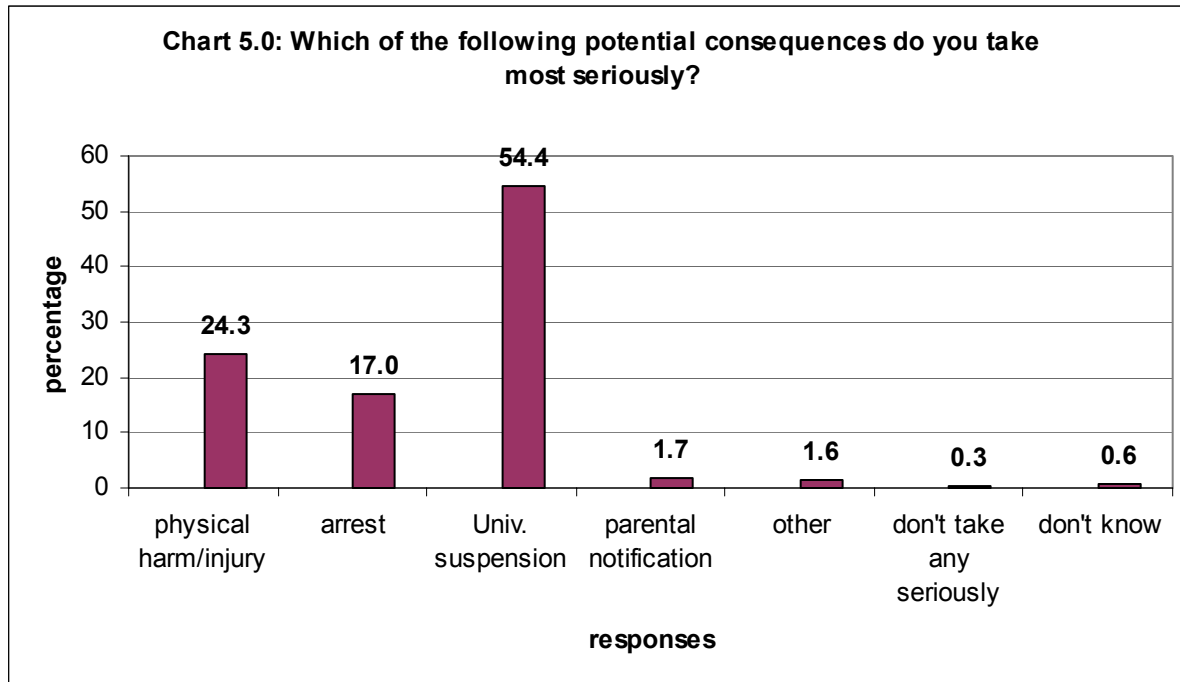


### Effectiveness of Strategies

In SP02, students were asked a series of questions about potential consequences of participating in or being a spectator at any disturbance and/or strategies being used to prevent future incidents.

Students were asked which of the following potential consequences would they take most seriously: physical harm or injury, arrest, suspension from OSU, having your parents notified, or something else. (See Chart 5.0)

- Over 54% (54.4%) of undergraduate students responded that being suspended from OSU would be the consequence that they would take most seriously.
- Another 24% (24.3%) responded that the threat of physical harm or injury would be most influential for them.
- Seventeen percent (17.0%) noted that being arrested would be the consequence that they would take most seriously.



Students were also asked to rate the effectiveness of a number of strategies in preventing the off-campus disturbances from continuing. In addition, they were then asked which of these strategies they thought would be most effective in preventing further incidents. (See Tables 2.0 and 2.1)

- The two strategies that students replied were the most effective were suspending students directly involved in the riots and evicting those who host parties that lead to disturbances.
- Over 50% of students responded that suspending students who hosted parties that lead to a disturbance and strict enforcement of all drinking laws would be “very effective” or “somewhat effective” strategies.
- In addition, at least 36% of students thought that limiting keg purchases, removing beer bottles from stores, and providing “party smart” information would be either “very effective” or “somewhat effective” in preventing off-campus disturbances.

**Table 2.0: Perceived effectiveness of prevention strategies (n=304)**

Responses by percent	Suspending students directly involved in the riots	Suspending students who host parties that lead to a disturbance	Strict enforcement of all drinking laws (i.e. open container, underage)	Landlords evicting those who host parties that lead to disturbances
Very effective	28.9	16.3	21.5	41.0
Somewhat effective	38.3	34.7	35.2	38.1
Slightly effective	21.5	17.1	18.7	11.5
Not at all effective	11.3	31.1	23.4	9.3
Refused/ don't know	0.0	0.8	1.1	0.0

Responses by percent	Limiting the number of kegs that can be purchased per household	Removing beer in bottles from the local stores	Providing “Party Smart” information about how to host a party responsibly
Very effective	13.1	9.7	5.1
Somewhat effective	30.7	27.3	30.8
Slightly effective	18.1	16.1	23.2
Not at all effective	37.3	46.0	40.6
Refused/ don’t know	0.8	1.0	0.3

**Table 2.1: Which, if any, of the strategies mentioned will be most effective? (and summary of prevention strategies)**

Rank Order	Percent who said “most effective” strategy	Percent who said “effective”*
Suspending students directly involved	38.3	67.2
Tenant Evictions	32.0	79.1
Suspending student hosting parties	7.9	51.0
Strictly enforcing drinking laws	6.4	56.7
Limiting keg purchases	4.4	43.8
Removing bottles from stores	3.5	37.0
Providing “Party Smart” information	3.8	35.9
Other	2.8	NA
Nothing/Don’t know	0.9	NA

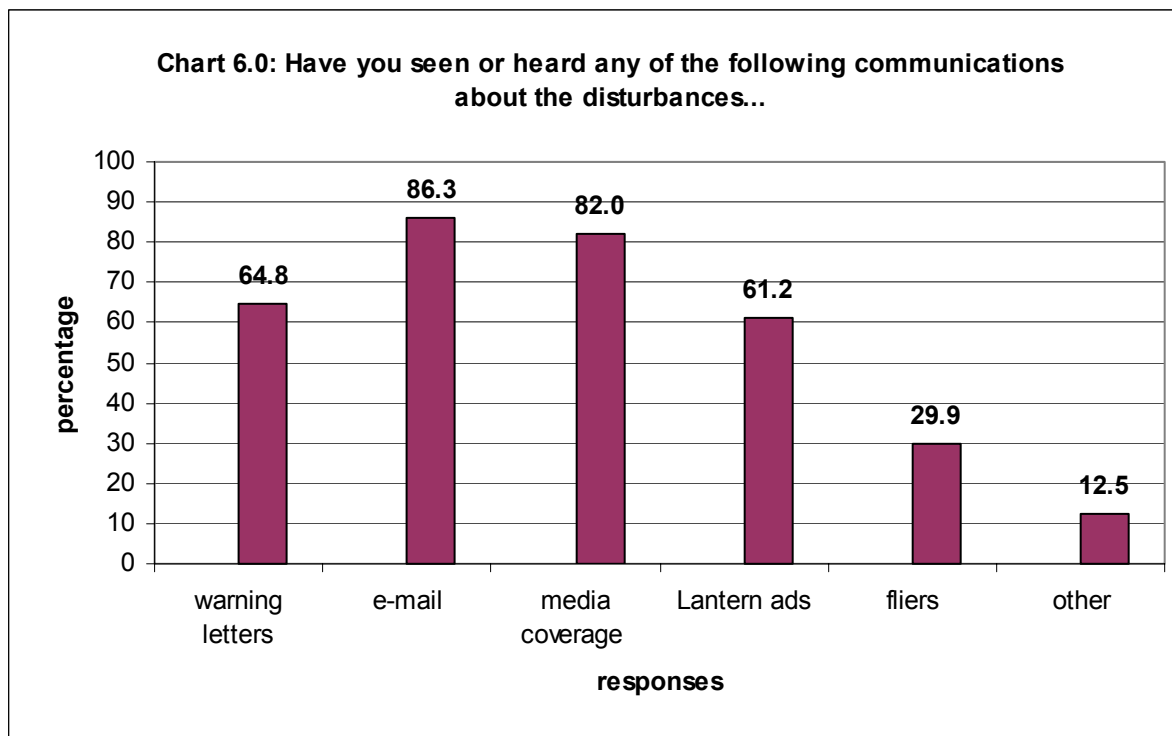
\* A sum of students who responded “very effective” and “somewhat effective” to each strategy as presented in Table 2.0.

## APPENDIX

In Chart 6.0, data are presented regarding the effectiveness of various means of communications with students regarding the off-campus disturbances. Students were asked the following:

The University has used a number of ways to communicate with students about the disturbances. Have you seen or heard any of the following...?

- Most students (over 80%) replied that they had seen or heard about the disturbances through e-mail and media coverage.
- Over 60% had seen the warning letters and the ads in the Lantern.



*For more information, contact Andrea Dowhower at Student Affairs Assessment (614-247-6220 or Lewis Horner at the OSU Center for Survey Research, at 614-292-6672.*